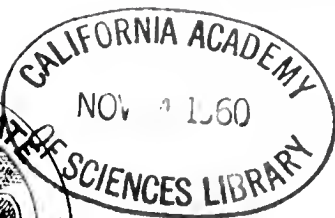


THE
MONTHLY



GULL
BULLETIN

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OCTOBER TRIP TO THE NEWARK SALTMARSH SANCTUARY

Sunday the 10th will be remembered as "the day of the big wind" by the thirty odd members and guests who turned out at Newark. Co-leader Harold Peterson secured permission for us to drive in to the gun club parking area. Beyond this point only some dozen hardy bird-seekers ventured along the northwestern levee. The gale whipped up whitecaps on the pinkish salt ponds and blew froth into our faces. Only smaller birds like sandpipers and pipits would take wing voluntarily. A noteworthy discovery was the finding of most sanctuary signs still in place!

Lunch afterward at the Giles estate in Irvington was a welcome relief from saltmarsh exposure. Our hosts served coffee in their youth-recreation hall. Resident magpies and Mockingbirds were heard and seen in the huge trees, but the local population of colorful geese, guinea hens and chickens had taken refuge from the wind. Junea Kelly became quite ecstatic over her discovery of these old, picturesque pines, araucarias, peppers, camphor and eucalypti in this oasis amid pressing subdivisions... which we agree should someday become public park.

The following species were seen on or near the saltmarsh: Eared Grebe; White Pelican; Great Blue Heron; Black-crowned Night Heron; Pintail; Shoveler; Red-tailed Hawk; Killdeer; Black-bellied Plover; Willet; Greater Yellowlegs; Least and Western Sandpipers; Dunlin; Long-billed Dowitcher; Godwit; Avocet; Northern Phalarope; California Gull; Ring-billed Gull; Forster Tern; American Pipit; Song and Savannah Sparrows. On or near the Giles place were seen: Sparrow Hawk; Anna Hummingbird; Mourning Dove; Red-shafted Flicker; Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker; Violet-green Swallow; Scrub Jay; Yellow-bellied Magpie; Chestnut-backed Chickadee; Mockingbird; Robin; Golden-crowned Kinglet; Audubon Warbler; House Sparrow; Western Meadowlark; Brewer Blackbird; House Finch; Brown Towhee; White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrow... a total of 44 species for the day.

PAUL F. COVEL, Leader

SPECIAL NOTE: Christmas Counts. Put these dates on your calendar: Oakland - December 31 (Saturday); Tomales Bay - January 2 (Monday); San Francisco - December 26 (Monday.)

WINTER BEHAVIOR OF ROBINS IN THE BAY AREA

PART I -- FINDING FOOD

By Howard L. Cogswell

Even the "laymen" of the Bay Area, those not interested in birds, usually recognize the Robin as a familiar dooryard bird that seeks its diet of earthworms on well-watered lawns. Some even know that Robins

build a large adobe-style nest with mud and straw. But it is chiefly the bird students and the homeowners with an invested interest in *Pyracantha* or other winter-ripening berries who know best the Robin's feeding habits at that season. The real story of the behavior of this abundant "migratory thrush" (*Turdus migratorius*) of America involves much of interest to laymen, bird enthusiast, and serious student of animal behavior alike. This brief account of the Robin's method of locating sources of berry food in winter is a first chapter in that story.

As every one who has a clump of *Pyracantha* or *Cotoneaster* bushes red with berries in a residential district knows, they may be just about stripped of their fruits within a few days once a flock of Robins descends upon them. Then the flock disappears, even though it often takes only a little observation along adjacent blocks to disclose many other shrubs of the same kinds with berries still untouched. In such circumstances persons who don't make any search except in and near their own yards often ask me, "Where have the Robins gone?" or, "Haven't the Robins left early this year?"

Of course the over-all population of Robins in the Bay Area is much greater in winter than in summer because many of the birds that are here from about November to March go north to breed (more about this in a future chapter.) The numbers present are also much higher in some winters than in others, as our estimates at the big communal roost in Joaquin Miller Park, Oakland, show. When there are many Robins in the area relative to the supply of ripening berries, their food-finding tactics then assume great importance. If you are patient and watch an actively feeding flock some day, and perhaps even follow them to new feeding grounds when one area is dwindling in nourishment, see if your observations agree with mine.

On the several occasions that I have so watched a flock of Robins (sometimes with Cedar Waxwings admixed, sometimes not) the pattern seems to go something like this:

1. Birds flying over singly or in small groups at moderate to tree-top height perch conspicuously for several minutes in trees or on wires; they may call occasionally.

2. If there are numbers of other Robins calling a block or two away, these birds soon fly toward them; if not, they may drop down to shrub or to ground level when all is quiet near them.

3. In the latter instance, any red berries of their favorite sorts in the area may be sampled, and some feeding of the "short run--stop, look and listen" sort on the ground is also carried out.

4. If one of these few birds finds the berries to its liking, it will pluck up to a dozen or more in fairly rapid succession, swallowing them whole and often with some effort.

5. Then, the same bird either remains almost motionless on its perch in the bush -- or, more frequently, it will fly up to a higher (and safer) perch within a hundred feet or so of the food bush, especially if there has been any recent disturbance in the vicinity.

6. After sitting and "digesting" for some 5 to 20 minutes, this same bird again drops down to the ground or directly to the berry bushes.

7. With several birds in the area all doing these same things but not in unison, there are soft calls and sharp bill snappings whenever one approaches close to another already in the food bushes. Yet they seem to be attracted to the spots where other Robins are already feeding.

8. Other Robins arriving overhead (as in No. 1) now are attracted, and move in to join the feeding group.

9. As the feeding flock grows in size, the soft calls are frequently

interspersed with louder ones, and the bill-snappings are more frequent. These acts and the almost steady flying of some birds or other between food bushes and perch trees or wires becomes a veritable hubbub when 100 or more birds are thus engaged.

10. Robins flying over at considerable altitude and in flocks (presumably from nearby depleted areas, or from the roost) now sometimes can be seen to swerve sharply into trees or onto wires near the feeding group and then soon join in the routine--or they may even swing directly in to follow those flying to the berries (which are, of course, now doomed!).

11. The value of this noisy flock behavior is seen when dog or cat or rapidly moving human appears on the scene: the whole flock flies up to their already familiar safe high perches at the first alarm note, and all remain on the alert there so long as any of them give the loud "tewk" note.

12. Resumption of feeding by a few when the disturbing agent has departed is followed quickly by mass return to the bushes.

13. Steps 4 through 12 are repeated or go on indefinitely, until a diminished food supply causes more and more birds to revert to Step 1 and search for other feeding areas which on some occasions I have noted to be at least several blocks away. Or, alternatively, ---

14. In the late afternoon the whole feeding sequence is superseded by another set of reactions that ultimately takes the birds to their roost. Although I shall describe the behavior while going to and at the roost in a future chapter, there is one question related to the flock-feeding routines of birds that go to the roost that begs for an answer. Do any of the same Robins return, after spending the night at a distant roost, to feed on the same bushes as the day before and if so, do they find them by some sort of memory or is each day's food a "find" in itself?

Although I have no more than a guess and a hope for some evidence as to the answer to the question just posed, it is my suggestion from the other observations summarized here that Robins do find distinct survival advantage in "ganging-up", especially when feeding amid bushes (where the individual bird is less able to keep a full lookout for danger.) Also, this behavior pattern has become sufficiently stereotyped by selection in the species so that the bulk of the wintering populations in the Bay Area find their berry food in this manner. The more or less random search aspect apparent in the initial step in the formation of a feeding group, coupled with the build up to the flock level, is thus suggested as the explanation for the fact that the Robins have "come, consumed, and gone" from one area while shrubs on some other very similar residential streets nearby are still laden with berries. Of course when the population of Robins is at its peak, and the search for food becomes more desperate as the winter goes on, then many of the bypassed islands of food eventually get taken. In other years, with a lower population, many such berries remain on the shrubs until after the Robins have shifted again (by February at least) to a predominantly ground-foraging type of behavior.

SEPTEMBER TRIP TO BAY FARM ISLAND

Although the Frontage Road loafing grounds for shorebirds has undergone many changes in the last year, 25 of us revisited it on Saturday, September 17. The former habitat has been drained and now has only a small number of birds, mostly gulls. We saw few sandpipers.

Across the channel to the northwest, where some Salicornia still remains, about 500 of the larger birds loafed. Willet, Long-billed Curlew, and Marbled Godwit were the most easily seen. In a pond that had been created by dredging a dozen Northern Phalarope were feeding.

We moved on to the southern end of Frontage Road and walked along a canal leading to the bay. Here we found Pintail, American Widgeon, and Ruddy Duck. We counted 35 American Widgeon. And then a Short-eared Owl and a Marsh Hawk flew over.

We reached Mecartney Drive at high tide. About 300 Avocet were resting in the old sand-spit area. As the tide receded 30 Long-billed Curlew came in and started to feed. Small groups of sandpipers also appeared.

We ended our trip by a visit to the beach, where the old destroyers used to lie.

The following 52 species were observed during the day: Pied-billed Grebe; Great Blue Heron; Common and Snowy Egret; Black-crowned Night Heron; Pintail; American Widgeon; Ruddy Duck; Turkey Vulture; Marsh and Sparrow Hawk; American Coot; Semipalmated and Snowy Plover; Killdeer; Black-bellied Plover; Ruddy and Black Turnstone; Long-billed Curlew; Whimbrel; Willet; Least Sandpiper; Short-billed Dowitcher; Western Sandpiper; Marled Godwit; American Avocet; Northern Phalarope; Western, California, and Ring-billed Gull; Forster, Elegant, and Caspian Tern; Mourning Dove; Short-eared Owl; Anna and Allen Hummingbird; Western Flycatcher; Horned Lark; Robin; Water Pipit; Loggerhead Shrike; Yellow Warbler; House Sparrow; Western Meadowlark; Redwinged and Brewer Blackbird; Brown-headed Cowbird; House Finch; Brown Towhee; Savannah and Song Sparrow.

HAROLD G. PETERSON, Leader and Historian

SEPTEMBER TRIP TO GOLDEN GATE PARK

On Sunday, September 25, when a group of 30 birded in Golden Gate Park, we all thought we were in for a disappointing time. It was one of those drowsy days we rarely have in San Francisco when the temperature climbs into the 80's and the bird watchers seem a great deal livelier than the birds. However, by lunch time, we had built up a pretty fair list.

We went to the Japanese Tea Garden first but moved over to the Strybing Arboretum as soon as it opened. The rarity of the day was an Osprey seen flying south, one of the few times an Osprey has ever been observed in this area. It was unusual also, but of course not rare, to see three Red-tailed Hawks overhead and to have good views of at least half a dozen Hutton Vireos.

From the arboretum we went to Metson Lake, where we watched some Northern Phalaropes while we ate lunch, as well as the usual assortment of coots and ducks and Brewer Blackbirds. About 50 Phalaropes had come to Metson Lake two weeks earlier; at the time of our field trip only about 12 remained. The group broke up after lunch, although a few of us went on to the North Lake of the Chain of Lakes for another hour's birding.

The following 37 species were seen in the park: Mallard; American Widgeon; Red-tailed Hawk; Osprey; California Quail; American Coot; Northern Phalarope; Western and California Gulls; Anna and Allen Hummingbirds; Belted Kingfisher; Red-shafted Flicker; Downy Woodpecker; Black Phoebe; Western Flycatcher; Scrub Jay; Chestnut-backed Chickadee; Red-breasted Nuthatch; Brown Creeper; Winter Wren; Robin;

Hermit Thrush; Hutton and Warbling Vireos; Orange-crowned, Townsend, and Wilson Warblers; House Sparrow; Brewer Blackbird; House Finch; Pine Siskin; Rufous-sided Towhee; Oregon Junco; White-crowned, Fox, and Song Sparrows.

Earlier in the morning, on their way to the Park via the Cliff House, some of our group saw four additional species there: Brown Pelican, Brandt Cormorant, Black Turnstone, and Heermann Gull.

ERLINE HEVEL, Leader and Historian

SEPTEMBER TRIP TO THE DAVIS-WOODLAND AREA

On September 11, a very warm Sunday morning, about a dozen members and friends of the Golden Gate Audubon Society met at the Southern Pacific Station in Davis. From there we went to the wastewater disposal ponds of the Spreckels Sugar Company (one mile east of Woodland) to observe a variety of shorebirds. There were Avocets in good numbers, and dowitchers and Least Sandpipers by the hundreds. There were also a few Marbled Godwits, unusual for this inland location; but the three Pectoral Sandpipers we saw were our highlight of the day.

With the temperature fast climbing to a high of 103 degrees, we gave up plans for visiting other birding places after lunch... it was just too hot.

We saw the following 35 species during the trip, including Woodland and Davis: Mallard; Pintail; Shoveler; Turkey Vulture; Red-tailed Hawk; Ring-necked Pheasant; American Coot; Killdeer; Greater Yellowlegs; Pectoral Sandpiper; Long-billed Dowitcher; Western Sandpiper; Marbled Godwit; American Avocet; Wilson and Northern Phalarope; Ring-billed Gull; Mourning Dove; Red-shafted Flicker; Acorn Woodpecker; Barn Swallow; Scrub Jay; Yellow-billed Magpie; Common Crow; Mockingbird; Loggerhead Shrike; Yellow Warbler (in Woodland); House Sparrow; Western Meadowlark; Redwinged and Brewer Blackbird; House Finch; American Goldfinch.

E. A. ALBERTSON, Leader and Historian

OUR BAY AREA SANCTUARIES AND WARDENS

After an on-the-spot conference of several Audubon chapters and Sierra Club representatives October 9 at Redwood City, National Audubon Society Representative William N. Goodall has announced the appointment of a new, part-time Audubon warden to serve under direction of Warden John Larson in patrol of our southbay sanctuaries. He will start at opening of the waterfowl season October 15 and continue through to season's final closing on January 8. His name is Mr. Cliff McGheehee; address 905 Chevy Street, Belmont; telephone LY 3-0323. Mr. Larson may be contacted at the Richardson Bay Sanctuary -- DUnlap 8-9843. Both Mr. Larson and Mr. McGheehee will spend some time with public relations and educational work... in order to explain the purposes and values of sanctuaries to the communities.

This may be an appropriate occasion to point out that while greater numbers of waterfowl, shore and wading birds may be seen in some other San Francisco Bay areas... outside of these Audubon sanctuaries... most of these other areas, still accessible to birds and bird-lovers, are already priced far beyond the reach of any foreseeable refuge-acquisition funds. Our South Bay Sanctuaries are held only as leases which may be cancelled at the option of Leslie Salt or Ideal Cement companies. It might have been very desirable for Audubon to have bought some such

tidal marsh property many years ago when prices were low, but unfortunately, refuge purchase funds have always been very limited. Along the Gulf coasts there were crucial nesting colony islands that were snatched from oblivion--but the sizeable bequests for such purposes have been almost nil in California! But it is hoped the mere existence of these leased sanctuaries and the Warden's presence and publicity will make an impact on Bay Region Communities which will result in future provision being made for such areas in all master planning.

PAUL COVEL, Conservation Chairman

JULY FIELD TRIP TO GOLDEN GATE PARK

On July 30, a foggy day, about twenty-five members and guests met in Golden Gate Park to study birds. Moulting season had begun, so there was very little song. At the Cliff House, several species had returned from their breeding grounds. On Seal Rocks, Western Gulls and Brandt Cormorants were feeding half-grown young. Miss Maxine Thacker of West Virginia, who has been to both the Maine and California Audubon camps this summer, was one of our guests.

The following 39 species were seen during the day: Brown Pelican; Brandt Cormorant; Mallard; California Quail; Coot; Surfbird; Black Turnstone; Wandering Tattler; Western Gull; Heermann Gull; Caspian Tern; Pigeon Guillemot; Mourning Dove; Anna and Allen Hummingbird; Belted Kingfisher; Downy Woodpecker; Olive-sided Flycatcher; Violet-green Swallow; Scrub Jay; Chestnut-backed Chickadee; Red-breasted Nuthatch; Brown Creeper; Winter Wren; Robin; Swainson Thrush; Hutton Vireo; Orange-crowned Warbler; Yellowthroat; Wilson Warbler; House Sparrow; Brewer Blackbird; Brown-headed Cowbird; House Finch; Pine Siskin; Rufous-sided Towhee; Oregon Junco; White-crowned and Song Sparrow. Mallard and quail had young with them, and Robins, siskins, juncos, white-crowns and Song Sparrows were feeding young out of the nest.

FLORENCE PLYMELL, Leader and Historian

FORT FUNSTON. The General Services Administration has delayed until March 1 the auction of the surplus land at Fort Funston. Most civic groups agree it should be preserved, but some say as a combined park-housing development. The projected population of San Francisco requires that open space be saved now while it is still possible. A public hearing, with all sides included, is needed!

AILEEN PIERSON TO REPRESENT G.G.A.S. IN NEW YORK

The Editors were very pleased to learn that one of their number, Miss Aileen Pierson, the Assistant Editor, is to be our delegate to the national convention from October 29 until November 1 in New York.

Miss Pierson, besides serving in the dual capacity of Assistant Editor and Field Trips Editor, has given her time in many other ways to our society. She has led many a field trip for us as well as being the compiler for the San Francisco Christmas count last year.

Congratulations to Aileen for this well-deserved honor. We look forward to interesting reports upon her return. The Editor.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Editor wishes to apologize to all, and to take full responsibility for the lateness of The Gull this last month.

To all contributors to The Gull: All bird names should be capitalized, but not other species names (such as live oak.) Proper

names in a bird's name should be written thus... Wilson Petrel, instead of Wilson's Petrel.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES. This year's conference will be held in Santa Barbara on November 17-19 with the theme "The Citizens' Role in Conservation." Many pertinent questions will be on the program including the water issue and the seashore parks program. Round tables and workshops in education and other aspects of conservation will be held. For further information contact the Audubon office in Berkeley, or write the California Conservation Council, 912 Santa Barbara Street, Santa Barbara, California.

OBSERVATIONS AND FIELD NOTES: Just hitting the highlights of the past month... Spreckels Sugar Ponds near Davis turned up many interesting species such as, on September 24, an AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER and a SOLITARY SANDPIPER were seen (Guy McCaskie and Richard Stallcup), and on October 2, two SANDERLINGS, two RED PHALAROPES, a RUDDY TURNSTONE (all unusual in the valley), a MOUNTAIN PLOVER, and best of all, a GULL-BILLED TERN (Marie Mans, Richard Stallcup.) On October 8, five PECTORAL SANDPIPERS, two BAIRD SANDPIPERS and 27 WHITE-FACED GLOSSY IBIS were seen at Los Banos (RS, Jack Mann). On October 10 a stray LEACH PETREL was found, still alive, in Orinda (RS.) Three Skuas were seen on Oct. 20 a few miles beyond the Farallones (Ben King.) On October 22 three Tropical Kingbirds were seen in the Tomales Bay region on the G. G. A. S. field trip. Two Surf Scoters showed up on the Davis Ponds on Oct. 15 (GMcC.)

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following members to the Golden Gate Audubon Society: from Alameda, Mr. & Mrs. Joseph B. Carroll; from Berkeley, Miss Gladys M. Stilson, Dr. Jessie M. Bierman, Mr. & Mrs. Robert L. Lewis, and Mr. Copeland MacClintock; from Oakland, Mr. Glenn Petersen; from San Francisco, Mrs. Henry Hart and Mrs. Naomi S. Svenningsen; and from Stockton, Mr. Donald McLaughlin.

AGNES OCZKEWECZ, Membership Chairman

NOVEMBER MEETING

The 512th regular meeting of the Golden Gate Audubon Society will be held on Thursday, November 10, 1960, in Oakland, 7:30 p.m. at the Rotary Natural Science Center on Lake Merritt, near the duck feeding station.

Our President, Roberta Long, will be our speaker, whose subject is "Habits and Habitats of Australian Birds," illustrated with pictures taken on a trip to "down under" country with Mrs. Kelly, of "Six Trips Afield" fame, September to November, 1959.

Mrs. Long will also have recordings of Australian bird songs, including those of the Lyrebird, and the Kookaburra. The opportunity of seeing these pictures and hearing the bird songs of that strange (to many of us) land is not to be missed. Bring friends. They cannot fail to enjoy it!

A no-host dinner preceeding the meeting will be held, at Conover's Restaurant, Perkins and Grand Avenue, just one block from the science center. Six o'clock. Everyone welcome!

MRS. CECIL EARLE, Program Chairman



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Claims for missing numbers of THE GULL should be sent to the Distribution Chairman. Changes of address should be sent to the Membership Chairman.

Monthly meetings second Thursday, 7:30 p.m. Joint Membership, Local and National, \$6.50 per year, includes AUDUBON MAGAZINE and THE GULL. Subscription to THE GULL separately, \$1.50 per year.

Visit the Conservation Resource Center of the NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY
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